

ISSUE 10



Does the Modern University Have Its Roots in the Islamic World?

YES: Mehdi Nakosteen, from *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education: A.D. 800–1350* (University of Colorado Press, 1964)

NO: Walter Rüegg, from "The University as a European Institution," in Hilde De Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe, volume I* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Professor of history and philosophy of education Mehdi Nakosteen traces the roots of the modern university to the Golden Age of Islamic culture (750–1150 C.E.). He maintains that Muslim scholars assimilated the best of classical scholarship and developed both the experimental method and the university system, which they passed on to the West before declining.

NO: Emeritus professor of sociology Walter Rüegg calls the university "the European institution *par excellence*," citing its origin as a community of teachers and taught, accorded certain rights that included the granting of degrees, and as a creation of medieval Europe—the Europe of papal Christianity.

As in many other issues, much depends on how we define a university. If one thinks of "higher education"—a serious pursuit of advanced learning, under the tutelage of scholars of acknowledged reputations—we can trace one path of historical research. If, instead, we define the university as a corporation, dedicated to learning rather than commerce, and possessing specialized functions and titles, we might travel a different path. Since the cultural world of medieval Europe is better known, let's begin with the forces and events that created the Muslim world of the same time period.

In the seventh century of this era, the prophet Muhammad united the Arab world under the banner of a new monotheistic religion, Islam, which means "surrender" to Allah or God. Muhammad's 622 "flight" from Mecca to Medina, known as Hijra or the breaking of former ties, marks the beginning of the Muslim lunar calendar. The Christian solar calendar begins with the birth of Jesus, calling

everything after that date A.D. for *anno Domini* (in the year of our Lord) and everything before that date B.C. (before Christ). The year 2000 on the Christian calendar was 1420 A.H. [*anno Hegirae*] on the Muslim calendar. Scholars often use C.E. (common era) to replace A.D. and B.C.E. (before the common era) to replace B.C. You will find the A.H. and A.D. designations used in the following selections.

United under Islam, Arab warriors conquered the Persian Empire, took some Byzantine cities, crossed north Africa, and invaded Europe. Stopped at 732 in Tours, France, the Islamic conquest ushered in a "golden age" of learning centered in Cordoba, the capital of Muslim Spain. At that time, Muslims claim that the largest monastery library in Europe contained fewer than 100 books, whereas the library in Cordoba contained over 500,000. At a time when Europe had lost much of its Greco-Roman intellectual heritage and learning was at a low point, Muslim scholars were translating Greek works from the Persian and Byzantine cultures into Arabic and commenting on them. This learning, along with their original contributions in mathematics, medicine, science, and philosophy, was passed on to the West when Islamic culture was conquered first by the Seljuk Turks and later by Genghis Khan and the Mongols of Central Asia.

The Western intellectual debt to Islamic scholars is accepted widely. However, what about the college or university as an institution of higher learning? Were Western scholars able to take the world's heritage of learning and use it to fashion the modern world because they invented the university or because it, too, was borrowed from the Islamic world? It has been said that where you stand determines what you see. In the following selections professors Nakosteen and Rüegg stand within different cultural and academic traditions. Taking the "golden age" of Islamic culture into account permits Nakosteen to build a case for the Islamic origins of the university. If civilization began with the Greeks, however, and the Greeks had no universities, then Europeans logically conclude that the university must have been invented by Europeans. As predecessors and components of universities, colleges have a different history. Here, we find a point of agreement, as professor Rüegg grants they might be traced to Islamic models.

Nakosteen argues that the language barrier and general inaccessibility of historical material to Western scholars, along with religious prejudice and the decline of Islamic culture, have made it easy for Europeans to assume credit for the modern university. In actuality, he maintains, the university is rooted in the Islamic world. Rüegg, however, is concerned primarily with determining which European city—Bologna or Paris—can claim to be the first university. Using his definition of what constitutes a university, Rüegg cannot grant Muslim institutions of higher learning the title or status of a university.

The challenge put forth by Nakosteen is part of the revisionist process that has been going on in history for the last 30 or so years. Part of that process is challenging assumptions that have gone unchallenged for centuries. As other issues in this book have demonstrated, modern scholars are examining the influence of Africa on the Greeks and considering the contributions from Asia and the Arabic world with a new openness. Decide for yourself which definition of the entity called university is more accurate and which path of historical inquiry you find more compelling.

YES 

Mehdi Nakosteen

The Nature and Scope of Muslim Education, 750–1350

All dates refer to A.D. unless otherwise specified.

Europe was in its medieval period when the Muslims wrote a colorful chapter in the history of education. Many of their greatest contributions, particularly to Western education, have gone unnoticed because of religious prejudice, language barriers, the decline of Islamic culture, and inaccessibility of historic materials for Western historians of education. The Muslims assimilated through their educational system the best of classical cultures and improved them. Among the assimilated fields were philosophy and Hellenistic medical, mathematical, and technological sciences; Hindu mathematics, medicine, and literature; Persian religions, literature, and sciences; and Syrian commentaries on Hellenistic science and philosophy. By applying the classical sciences to practical pursuits, the Muslims developed the empirical-experimental method, although they failed to take full advantage of it. Later the method was adopted in Europe. They encouraged free inquiry and made available to the public the instruments of research and scholarship. They opened their public and even private libraries to public use, not only regionally but internationally. At a time when books were "published" only through the tedious labor of copyists, they made hundreds, even thousands, of copies of reference materials and made them available to all caring to learn from them. Often they allowed scores of books—sometimes more than a hundred per person—to be borrowed for an almost indefinite time for special studies and prolonged research. They provided food, lodging, and even incidental money for scholars from far away; they made their great teachers internationally accessible by encouraging the concept of the travelling scholar.

In the golden age (750–1150) of their cultural-educational activities they did not permit theology and dogma to limit their scholarship. They searched into every branch of human knowledge, be it philology, history, historiography, law, sociology, literature, ethics, philosophy, theology, medicine, mathematics, logic, jurisprudence, art, architecture, or ceramics. They respected learning; they honored the scholar. They introduced the science and philosophy of the Greeks, Persians, and Hindus to Western Christian schoolmen. But the story of Western education's debt to Islam is still to be written with fullness.

From *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education, A.D. 800–1350*, by Mehdi Nakosteen (University Press of Colorado, 1964), pp. 37–42, 52–53, 61–63 (excerpts). Copyright © 1964 by University Press of Colorado. Reprinted by permission.

of knowledge and without prejudice and predetermination of results. What kind of education was responsible for so much in so short a time?

Muslim education went through two distinct periods. First was the period covering the ninth and tenth centuries, when schools developed spontaneously with private endowments interested in public enlightenment; and second the period beginning in the eleventh century and developing through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when education became the function of the state, and schools were institutionalized for purposes of sectarian education and political indoctrination.

Madrasahs and Nizamiyyas

A new type of school was conceived as a state institution to promote religious indoctrination of the Sunnite Islamic faith and political indoctrination of a Turkish-Persian style, aside from general learning and particular training. Nizam-al-Mulk (d. 1092; 485 A.H.), the founder and popularizer of these *madrasahs* (schools of public instruction), was a famous vizier (prime minister) in the administration of the Seljuq sultans in the eleventh century. He established the madrasah about the middle of that century, which, though not the first school in Islam, was the first system of special schools geared to that state and Sunnite Islam. The madrasahs had, aside from their zest for learning, both political and religious purposes—the moulding of public opinion in Sunnite orthodox Islam against the Shi'ah branch. Large sums of money were allotted for the establishment and maintenance of these schools with generous scholarships, pensions, and rations granted to all worthy students. In fact, Nizam arranged for regular stipends to all students. The schools were institutionalized under state control and support, and standardized madrasahs were established in all large cities within Islam, with the exception of Spain and Sicily. The greatest of these academies was the one established by Nizam in Baghdad, the famous *Nizamiyyah*, which opened for teaching in 1066–67 (459 A.H.) and continued as a center of learning for several centuries, motivated primarily by religious and literary pursuits. Altogether, Nizam-al-Mulk made the greatest single contribution to education in founding and extending an almost universal system of schools (madrasahs) throughout Eastern Islam.¹ He was one of the most learned men of his time, greatly versed in Muslim hadith, or tradition, and one of the great political theorists of Islam, as shown in his famous *Siyasat-Namah*. His passion for universal education was limited only by the means at his disposal. The schools he founded all over the empire were endowed generously. He supplied them with libraries, the best professors he could find, and a system of scholarships to aid all the students. Let us look into his educational enterprise in some detail.

Nizam-al-Mulk and Muslim Education

The opening of the first school carrying the name of the Persian statesman, Nizam-al-Mulk, took place in 1066 (459 A.H.). It marks the transition from the mosque schools and the beginning of a system of public schools, or madrasahs, throughout the vast area of the Muslim world, which was under strong Persian

cultural and administrative influence. This influence continued, first under Arab political supremacy under the Abbassides from the middle of the eighth century to the ninth, and again during the long period of Turkish (Ottoman) politico-religious supremacy, to the early decades of the sixteenth century (1517). It is true that the earlier Turks had a simple culture and were given to warfare and conquest. But settling down to administer their empire, they learned from the superior cultures of the Persians and the Arabs, adopted the Arabic alphabet, and accepted Islam. In time they adapted the foreign cultures to their own needs and tastes, and encouraged the establishment throughout their empire of schools to perpetuate Sunnite Islam and Turkish politics and policies. Tarikh Zaidan, in his *Al-Tamaddun al-Islami (History of Islamic Civilization)*, states that the Turkish princes encouraged learning and increased the number of schools in their empire, guided by three motives: The type of heavenly reward; the fear of losing their fortunes to more greedy superiors or antagonists, so that they utilized their wealth in establishing schools; finally, but most important of all, the desire to indoctrinate religious beliefs of the founder and to combat opposing religious views.

It was the employment of the school for sectarian indoctrination and political influence and propaganda that led the famous Seljuk Sultan Saladin to found madrasahs and also to close the college of Dar al-Ilm (The House of Learning) in Cairo in order to eliminate its Shi'ite influence. In fact it was not uncommon to dismiss professors during this period from the madrasahs because of their religious beliefs, particularly Shi'ite. Muslim scholasticism (*Ilm al-Kalam*) developed in these sectarian colleges of Sunnite or Shi'ite beliefs.

The Sunnite belief received its most sweeping expression under Nizam-al-Mulk. Before his day, there were several institutions of learning in the Islamic world which resembled a college, such as Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt, in the last quarter of the tenth century; Dar al-Ilm and Dar al-Hikmah, also in Cairo, in the early decades of the eleventh; Bait-al-Hikmah in Baghdad during the reign of al-Ma'mun; and Baihaqiyyah at Nishapur in Khorasan, Persia. But to Nizam-al-Mulk goes the distinct credit for having founded an institution for instruction and indoctrination under government and religious control, for political and religious ends—a sectarian system of public education with secular emphasis and political motivation.

With these objectives in mind, Nizam-al-Mulk established schools in every city and village of Iraq and Khorassan. Even a small place, such as "Kharn al-Jabal near Tus . . . had its teacher and school." These schools were well distributed from Khorassan in the east to Mesopotamia in the west. These so-called madrasahs soon became standardized, and many of them were built after the example of the one in Baghdad, which was built by Nizam-al-Mulk himself, and named Nizamiyyah (or Nidhamiyyah) in his honor.

Nizamiyyahs . . . were founded not only in Baghdad, but in Nisabur, Balkh, Herat, Isfahan, Marw, Basrah and Mosul. Not only did Nizam-al-Mulk establish these academies or colleges, but he endowed them. It is estimated that \$1,500,000 was spent annually on educational, semi-educational and religious institutions.

Nizamiyyah University, the most famous of the chain of madrasahs, was built in Baghdad in 1065 under the educator's personal supervision. The earliest account of this university is given by ibn Khaldun, the great Arab philosopher-historian, who says:

Nizam-al-Mulk ordered that Abu Is'haq al-Shirazi should be its professor, but when the people were assembled to hear him he did not appear. He was searched for, but was not to be found; so Abu Nasir ibn-al-Sabbagh was appointed to the post. Later Abu Is'haq met his classes in his mosque, but his students showed their dissatisfaction with his action and threatened to go over to ibn al-Sabbagh unless he accepted the professorship at the Nizamiyyah. Finally he acceded to their wishes, and ibn al-Sabbagh was dismissed after having lectured for only twenty days.

The chief reason for Abu Is'haq's refusal to teach at the Nizamiyyah was, according to ibn Khallikan, that he was "informed that the greater part of the materials employed in the construction of the college have been procured illegally." But the foregoing quotation is of extreme interest for the information it gives us that the mosques were the chief places of learning before the foundation of universities. There were over one hundred such mosques in Baghdad alone.

The principal motive in founding the Nizamiyyah was religious. Its objective was the teaching of "The Shafi'ite (Sunni) school of law," its sole emphasis being upon the teaching of theology and Islamic law, and it stood as a university of Islamic theological learning for several centuries. The great mystic al-Ghazzali taught there twenty-five years after its founding. Al-Abiwardi (d. 1104; 498 A.H.) and ibn Mubarak (d. 1184; 580 A.H.) were associated with it. Ibn Jubair who visited the school about the middle of the fourteenth century, said of it: "And in the midst of Suq al-Thalatha (Tuesday market) is the wonderful madrasah Al-Nizamiyyah, whose beauty has become proverbial."

Aims of Muslim Education

The aims of Muslim education in "medieval" times may be defined as follows:

1. Religious aims, based on (a) *Qur'an* as source of knowledge, (b) spiritual foundation of education, (c) dependence upon God, (d) sectarian morals, (e) subordination of secular subjects to religion, (f) equality of all men before God and man, (g) supremacy of Muhammad over all other prophets, (h) belief in the six articles of Imam or Creed (God, angels, scripture, prophets, judgment, decrees) and (i) belief (and application) in A'mal or religious duties, including confession of faith (There is no God but God), prayers, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage.

2. Secular aims, the importance of which is well suggested by a Muslim tradition, attributed to Muhammad, which says, "The best among you are not those who neglect this world for the other, or the other world for this. He is the one who works for both together." Among these aims were pursuit of all knowledge, as the revelation of the nature of God; education open to all on equal terms, limited only by ability and interest; and guidance and teaching as essential to promote (initiate) knowledge and education.

The *Mutakallimun* (*Loquentes*), the Muslim scholastic teachers (speakers of truths), stressed the importance of teachers whose knowledge may be traced back to revelation or may have been made manifest directly by intuition. This was the view of the theologian-philosopher-educator al-Ghazzali, who believed in three degrees of knowledge: (a) Common-sense knowledge, restricted by undisciplined sense-experience and dependent upon external authority; (b) scientific knowledge; (c) intuitive knowledge.

It is of interest to note that al-Ghazzali's concept of scientific knowledge includes seven basic principles or conditions: Stimulation of the search for scientific knowledge; application of scientific arts; advancement of applied sciences and extensive application of them; development of laboratory and experimental pursuits; encouragement of arts and crafts (It was Aristotle in particular, from among the Greeks, who appealed to Islam. This was because of the Greek master's application of philosophy and science to the arts and needs of everyday living and because of the adaptability of his philosophic and scientific concepts to the art of living and the necessities of individual and civic life); encouragement of individual initiative and academic freedom for both teachers and pupils (in the college of Baghdad an inquiring student, who greeted the great teacher with devoted *salams* [bows], often ended the day with an intellectual fist fight with his master in defense of some principles, refutation of others, or hairsplitting argument over insignificant details); attainment of excellence, to produce great men of learning and leaders in public affairs. The pragmatic spirit of their education is indicated by development of textile fabrics, of irrigation systems, of iron and steel products, of earthenwares, and leather products, by architectural innovations, weaving of rugs and carpets, manufacture of paper and gunpowder, maintenance of a merchant marine of a thousand ships, and advancement of commercial activity.

Although Muslim education aimed at practical training, such training was a rule based upon instruction in fundamental sciences. Thus, in the system, practice was sustained by theory; theory verified in practice. Even in commercial training, economics as a science was a foundational training.

It is of interest to note that as Islam began to decline after the end of the eleventh century, the number of its schools of higher learning increased and flourished. These colleges were, however, almost all denominational schools opened and supported by leaders of various Islamic religious factions. Each denominational college was open, with few exceptions, only to followers of a given sect. Religious and literary studies and Arabic language and grammar dominated the subject matter at the expense of philosophy, science, and social studies. The very abundance of these religious schools indicated the gradual decline which was under way. These colleges were intolerant of innovations, suspicious of secular studies, and aloof from creative scholars. Some of these colleges survived destruction by the Mongols in the thirteenth century and remained centers of dogmatic theological instruction to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

There was competition among these denominational schools, particularly between the Shi'ite and Sunnite (Hanafite) religious factions. This competition proved healthy in the increase of these colleges and in their facilities,

endowments, and the like, and would have been a tremendous educational power except for their limitations because of their religious nature.

It is of interest also to note that during this same period new universities were beginning to develop in western Europe, particularly in Italy, Germany, France, and England. But unlike the Islamic denominational schools, the Western universities were preserving the best intellectual elements that Islamic research and scholarship had developed during its creative centuries, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Islamic works were reaching Europe at about the same period (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) when secular learning was declining in Islam. The works of hundreds of translators not only enriched and created or enlarged many Western universities but brought about the Western Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One reason for this, of course, was the revival of secular interest and research in the West, which, though curtailed by religious passion until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was left relatively free from then on to discover new knowledges and usher in the modern world. . . .

The Curriculum of Muslim Schools

The curriculum of Muslim education at that time reminds us in its extensive and intensive nature of curricular programs of modern advanced systems of education, particularly on higher levels of education. It was not unusual to find instruction in mathematics (algebra, trigonometry, and geometry), science (chemistry, physics, and astronomy), medicine (anatomy, surgery, pharmacy, and specialized medical branches), philosophy (logic, ethics, and metaphysics), literature (philology, grammar, poetry, and prosody), social sciences, history, geography, political disciplines, law, sociology, psychology, and jurisprudence, theology (comparative religions, history of religions, study of the *Qur'an*, religious tradition [*hadith*], and other religious topics). They offered advanced studies in the professions, for example, law and medicine.

Their vocational curriculum was varied and founded on the more general studies; in fact, it appears generally to have been as comprehensive as their education was universal. The extent and depth of Muslim curriculum can be detected by references to a number of encyclopedias of general knowledge and specific disciplines, among them the celebrated *Encyclopedia of the Ikhwān al-Safā* (the *Brethren of Purity or Sincerity*), which was known to and respected by European schoolmen.

Another indication of the extent of Muslim curriculum is manifested in the fact that one Arabic dictionary contained sixty volumes, with an illustration for each definition. Again, its richness may be determined by its practical and useful consequences, leading to such ventures as calculating the angle of the ecliptic, measuring the size of the earth, calculating the procession of the equinoxes, inventing the pendulum clock, explaining in the field of optics and physics such phenomena as "refraction of light, gravity, capillary attraction and twilight," using the globe in teaching the geography of a round earth, developing observatories for the empirical study of heavenly bodies, making advances in the uses of drugs, herbs, and foods for medication, establishing hospitals with a

system of interns and externs, improving upon the science of navigation, introducing new concepts of irrigation, fertilization, and soil cultivation, discovering causes of certain diseases and developing correct diagnoses of them, proposing new concepts of hygiene, making use of anesthetics in surgery with newly innovated surgical tools, introducing the science of dissection in anatomy, furthering the scientific breeding of horses and cattle, and finding new ways of grafting to produce new types of flowers and fruits. In the area of chemistry, the curriculum led to the discovery of such substances as potash, alcohol, nitrate of silver, nitric acid, sulphuric acid, and corrosive sublimate. It also developed to a high degree of perfection the arts of textiles, ceramics, and metallurgy. . . .

Some Muslim Contributions to Education

Before concluding this brief summary of "medieval" Muslim education, it may be well to point out some of its basic contributions to educational theory and practice, and state also its basic shortcomings.

Throughout the twelfth and part of the thirteenth centuries, Muslim works on science, philosophy, and other fields were translated into Latin, particularly from Spain, and enriched the curriculum of the West, especially in northwestern Europe.

1. The Muslims passed on the experimental method of science, however imperfect, to the West.
2. The system of Arabic notation and decimals was introduced to the West.
3. Their translated works, particularly those of men such as Avicenna in medicine, were used as texts in classes of higher education far into the middle of the seventeenth century.
4. They stimulated European thought, reacquainted it with the Greek and other classical cultures and thus helped bring about the Renaissance.
5. They were the forerunners of European universities, having established hundreds of colleges in advance of Europe.
6. They preserved Greco-Persian thought when Europe was intolerant of pagan cultures.
7. European students in Muslim universities carried back new methods of teaching.
8. They contributed knowledge of hospitals, sanitation, and food to Europe.

The strength of the Muslim educational system lay in the following areas: It produced great scholars in almost every field. It developed literacy on a universal scale when illiteracy was the rule in Europe. It transmitted the best features of classical cultures to the West. It led the way in the development of libraries and universities. Its higher education in its creative centuries was open to rich and poor alike, the only requirements being ability and ambition. It held teachers and books in reverence, particularly on higher levels of instruction. The teacher, the book, the lecture, the debate—these were the nerve centers of its educational system.

The curriculum, which was in the early centuries balanced between sectarian and secular studies, became in the later centuries scholastic, making all or practically all secular studies subject to religious and theological approval. The curriculum became formal, fixed, traditional, religious, dogmatic, backward looking. It encouraged static minds and conformity. It became authoritarian and essentialist.

Whereas in its early centuries Muslim education encouraged debates, experimentation, and individualism, in its later stages it encouraged formal methods, memorization, and recitation. A system which was in its early stages rather spontaneous and free, encouraging individuals to pursue learning and inspire others to enlightenment, lost in the later stages this sense of intellectual adventure and its direction became superimposed from the top (the state and church) rather than inspired by the people. This led in time to an elite and aristocratic concept of education, replacing its early democratic educational spirit. Muslim education did not, and with its scholastic disciplines could not, take advantage of the tools of science and experimentation which it had inherited and improved upon. Rather, it passed on these tools to European men of science, who utilized them effectively after the Renaissance and thus initiated and developed the modern world of science.

Note

1. Among the leading founders of schools in Islam should also be mentioned al Ma'mun (d. 833; 218 A.H.), who supported and endowed the first great Muslim educational center in Baghdad, the famous *Bait-al-Hikmah*, and was instrumental in having Greek, Persian, and Hindu translations made into Arabic by the greatest scholars of the time; Nur-al-Din (d. 1173; 569 A.H.), the Sultan of the kingdom of Syria who, after the dissolution of the Seljuq Empire, founded schools in Damascus and throughout his kingdom, including Egypt; Saladin (d. 1193; 589 A.H.), who extended the school systems in Syria and Egypt.



Walter Rüegg



The University as a European Institution

The university is a European institution; indeed, it is the European institution *par excellence*. There are various reasons for this assertion.

As a community of teachers and taught, accorded certain rights, such as administrative autonomy and the determination and realization of curricula (courses of study) and of the objectives of research as well as the award of publicly recognized degrees, it is a creation of medieval Europe, which was the Europe of papal Christianity. This is shown in the first volume of our history.

It is, moreover, the only European institution which has preserved its fundamental patterns and its basic social role and functions over the course of history; it has indeed been strengthened and extended in these respects—as the four volumes will show. Of the three acknowledged powers of medieval European society—*regnum*, *sacerdotium*, and *studium*—the first, political power, has undergone profound changes. The second has, in the Roman Catholic Church, preserved its structure and expanded over the whole planet but it has lost the monopoly which it once possessed of providing the conditions of salvation. The same may be said for the other institutional and cultural creations of the Middle Ages, i.e. the distinctively European forms of organization of a money economy, the plastic arts, architecture, and music.

No other European institution has spread over the entire world in the way in which the traditional form of the European university has done. The degrees awarded by European universities—the bachelor's degree, the licentiate, the master's degree, and the doctorate—have been adopted in the most diverse societies throughout the world. The four medieval faculties of *artes*—variously called philosophy, letters, arts, arts and sciences, and humanities—law, medicine, and theology have survived and have been supplemented by numerous disciplines, particularly the social sciences and technological studies, but they remain none the less at the heart of universities throughout the world. Even the name of the *universitas*, which in the Middle Ages was applied to corporate bodies of the most diverse sorts and was accordingly applied to the corporate organization of teachers and students, has in the course of centuries been given a more particular focus: the university, as a *universitas litterarum*, has since the eighteenth century been the intellectual institution which

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cultivates and transmits the entire corpus of methodically studied intellectual disciplines.

Moreover, the university is a European institution because it has, in its social role, performed certain functions for all European societies. It has developed and transmitted scientific and scholarly knowledge and the methods of cultivating that knowledge which has arisen from and formed part of the common European intellectual tradition. It has at the same time formed an academic elite, the ethos of which rests on common European values and which transcends all national boundaries.

The various efforts which were made after the Second World War to establish 'European' universities were largely unsuccessful because of the resistance of the existing universities, which regarded themselves as European. Indeed, they pointed out that the diversity of national traditions was a precious European heritage and that, by means of their different national components, they contributed to the European community of scholarship and scholars.

It may be asked whether this account does in fact characterize the present situation. Are not the universities of Europe equally, if not more deeply, marked by the differences among the European national states which began to take form in the late Middle Ages and during the Reformation and which, particularly since the nineteenth century, changed the universities of the European continent *de facto*—and often *de jure* as well—into parts of the governmental system? Do they perform genuinely European functions when, in any particular member state of the European community, only about 1 per cent of the student body is made up of those who come from any of the other member states of the community and when, in many European countries, professors from other countries cannot be appointed or can be appointed only in exceptional circumstances? Can the existing European universities be said to be performing their proper social role when the rising generation of European scientists and scholars prefers to continue its studies in universities of another country where the European traditions of scientific and scholarly research and of the academic ethic are pursued with more enthusiasm, seriousness, commitment, and effectiveness than they are in Europe?

The Social Role of the European University

By social function or role is implied the totality of the actions performed in response to the expectations of conduct which others direct toward the incumbent of the particular role. These expectations are based on values towards which conduct is oriented, and the values are translated into norms which guide the socially expected conduct. Expectations, values, and norms are delineated by the explicit and implicit interests of the various social actors and they are often mutually contradictory.

Conflicts are inherent in social roles, and not least in those of universities. Their fundamental values and the norms which are binding on their members are not homogeneous. The values of the universal validity of the criteria, methods, and results of scientific and scholarly research cannot always be adhered to in consequence of the limitations on and diversity of the cognitive powers

of individual human beings. The equality of opportunity for admission to and continuance of studies at universities is in conflict with the inequality in the distribution of social and economic resources and of alternative uses for these resources. The precedence given to leisure and contemplation, which are necessary for scientific and scholarly research, represents an ideal of the *bios theoretikos*, which ever since the Greek philosophers has been contrasted and in conflict with the ideal of the *bios praktikos*, which gives precedence to social utility in the application of scientific knowledge and in the professional training provided by universities. The *amor sciendi*, which evaluates highly the search for truth by rigorous scientific and scholarly methods, is associated with indifference to the economic value of the results of research and teaching, and it stands in contradiction to the *ambitio dignitatis* and the *individia pecuniae*, the social and economic utilization of the fruits of academic study. Last but not least, the fundamental value of the academic freedom of the university as a corporate community stands in potential conflict, on two fronts: internally between the freedom of the individual and the collegial solidarity of the members of the university, and externally between the requirements of the university for autonomy and control by those who supply the necessary financial resources.

These and other conflicts are inherent in the social history of the university. To show the various forms which they have taken and the various solutions which have been attempted is the most important aim of our enterprise. Indeed, these conflicts, the tensions which arise from them, and the structures and mechanisms through which they are kept in a state of open equilibrium explain to a considerable extent the dynamics of the European universities. When one value becomes too preponderant and shifts the balance too markedly and too long to one alternative and away from the other, for example, to making the university into a governmental institution or into an ivory tower or into a vocational school or into a wholly self-contained scientific institution, the tensions lose their creative power and lead instead to somnolence or excessive superficial and fruitless agitation.

We certainly no longer share the view, which was put forward by Meiners and which was so characteristic of the Enlightenment, that the history of European universities can 'lead in part to the recognition and avoidance of their misconduct, deficiencies, and faults, and in part to the disclosure and emulation of their merits'. Just as a machine can only be repaired and made operable once more when the significance of its parts and their interdependence is understood and tested, so the university, which is a very complex social institution, must from time to time be subjected to a fundamental analysis. This fundamental analysis of its structures and functions, which have developed in the course of history, is indispensable if the deeper aspects of its social role are to be understood and realistically improved.

Themes

No period in the history of universities has been more intensively studied than the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, numerous gaps remain. Many archival documents, innumerable writings, and many of the lecture scripts of university

teachers are still unpublished. Biographical accounts of teachers and students, their social and familial origins, their patterns of association in the course of their studies, and their subsequent careers are markedly lacking. Such prosopographical investigations, which have already been taken in hand for particular universities or for certain regions of provenance, are indispensable for a genuinely social history of universities. Only when such studies have been done will it be 'possible to trace the channels of intellectual currents and influence, to reconstruct the composition and structure of intellectual groups and their connections with each other, and the lines of transmission and diffusion of certain intellectual traditions such as Aristotelianism in the thirteenth, Roman law in the fourteenth, humanism in the fifteenth, and the Reformation in the sixteenth centuries'.

For these reasons, our project can reflect only the present state of research. The aim of this introductory chapter is to show, with reference to a few themes, which perspectives have been opened up through studies of medieval universities, which problems have arisen from those studies, and what knowledge can be drawn from them.

Mythology and Historiography of the Beginnings

In 1988, the University of Bologna celebrated its nine-hundredth anniversary. However, neither our own investigation nor that of others into the history of medieval universities has produced any evidence for such a foundation of the University of Bologna in 1088. Rather, the upshot of these investigations is that no such event took place in 1088. In fact, 1088 was chosen a century ago as the 'conventional date' by a committee under the chairmanship of the famous poet Giosue Carducci; 1888 was to be the occasion for a grand jubilee to be celebrated in the presence of the royal family and rectors of universities from all over the world were to attend. The aim of the celebration was to imprint on the consciousness of the Italian people and of the whole world the knowledge that the recent and still not completely consolidated political unification of Italy could point for its legitimacy to the eight-centuries-long tradition of free research and teaching at the University of Bologna and its national and world-wide importance. The celebration of the eighth centenary of the University of Bologna in 1888 was in fact one of the commemorative celebrations and related symbolic manifestations which were arranged in the course of the nineteenth century in order to remind the nations of their past and its historical continuity and to fortify in them a sense of their national unity.

Commemorative celebrations focus on a particular date. For that reason, a particular date had to be found and it had to be one which was as early as possible so that the politically important, symbolic function of the University of Bologna as the 'mother of European universities' could not be challenged on that occasion. Carducci and his medievalist colleagues based their claim on a document of the thirteenth century. According to this document, the 'famous Irnerius' (1055/60–1125) and an 'unknown' Pepo were the first to have delivered lectures on law in Bologna. Jubilees in most instances stimulate historical research. Such research often corrects the date of foundation or shows the

historical account of the alleged foundation to be a myth. Even more than the jubilee celebrations of other universities, the celebration of the eight-hundredth anniversary of the University of Bologna released a flood of publications on the history of universities. We know now that Pepo was by no means 'unknown'; he was referred to in 1190 as '*clarum Bononiensium lumen*', and presented himself at the court of Emperor Henry-IV as an authority on Roman law. In this regard, Carducci would not have chosen the 'conventional date' badly, if in fact Pepo was the founder, or at least a member, of a university. The booklet published on the occasion of the celebration of the nine-hundredth anniversary justified 1088 as the date of foundation of the university by the argument that, in that year, there appeared free arrangements for the teaching of law which were independent of the religious schools of Bologna and that such independence was the mark of a university.

Is this argument defensible? No scholar doubts nowadays that, at various places in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there existed significant schools and that successful teachers appeared as independent masters who gathered around themselves a circle of pupils. In Bologna, *legum doctores*, who were active as lawyers and judges, joined with their pupils to form free corporations. There is also agreement among various investigators—as subsequent chapters show—that it was the associations of students (in Bologna) or of teachers and students (in Paris), which were granted special liberties and privileges in the thirteenth century, that first laid the basis for that form of higher education which in the Middle Ages was called *studium generale* and which later was designated as a university.

For this reason, Abelard, who taught in the first forty years of the twelfth century at Melun, Corbeil, and Paris, in part in a religious school and in part as probably the most famous independent teacher, has long since ceased to be regarded as the founder of the University of Paris. Similarly, the medical school of Salerno has lost its reputation as the oldest European university; it is, at best, regarded as a 'proto-university'. This does not, of course, detract from its scientific significance as a school for physicians in the tenth century, as a medical centre in the twelfth century, and as a model of medical research and teaching in the thirteenth century.

The origin of the first universities is a very complex process, as will be seen in the next chapter. Bologna or Paris may be called the oldest university depending on the weight which one attributes to one or another of the various elements which make up a university. If one regards the existence of a corporate body as the sole criterion, then Bologna is the oldest, but only by a slight margin. It was in Bologna that, towards the end of the twelfth century, the foreign students of law grouped themselves together as 'nations' and therewith developed a basic organizational form of the medieval European university. If one regards the association of teachers and students of various disciplines into a single corporate body as the decisive criterion, then the oldest university would be Paris, dating from 1208.

The question of which university is the oldest is of practical importance only when it has to be decided which rectors should be granted precedence in academic ceremonies and processions. The date of foundation is more important

because of the social and psychological significance of jubilees. Yet, . . . it is very difficult and often arbitrary to assign an exact date to the foundation of a particular university. This is true not only for the oldest universities, which arose only gradually and which are officially acknowledged in various written documents as having 'grown through custom', *e consuetudine*, in a sequence of stages. Even where the foundation of a university has occurred through an explicit decree or enactment, *e privilegio*, the question arises as to which particular event should be regarded as the date of foundation. Should it be the decision of a local authority to found a university or to recognize an existing school as a university, or should it be the recognition or endowment by papal, imperial, or royal authority, or should it be the executive decision by the local municipal authority, or the beginning of the teaching?

It is easier to answer the question as to whether the medieval university had forerunners or models. Very much like contemporary universities, the early universities dated their origins as early as possible. In Bologna, between 1266 and 1234, a founding document was forged, which asserted that the university was established in AD 423 by Emperor Theodosius. The University of Paris thought that it had been founded by Charlemagne, and, through his action, it was able to see itself as a continuator of the tradition of Roman higher education. Some claimed for Oxford an even earlier origin: when, following the destruction of their own city of Troy, the Trojans conquered Albion, it was said that they were accompanied by some philosophers who found a suitable place for themselves in Oxford. A more modest tradition contented itself with Alfred the Great (848–99) as the founder of Oxford. All of these fictions, which were questioned or refuted by the humanists, may be traced back to the medieval practice of legitimating an institution by asserting the antiquity of its origin. The assertion of a line of descent which traced medieval universities back to antiquity does have some justification, inasmuch as essential features of their intellectual substance were of classical origin and then christianized by Saint Augustine and other church fathers. Medieval scholars regarded themselves as dwarfs who stood on the shoulders of their gigantic ancient ancestors and who for that reason could see further. Nevertheless, the organizational form of the university cannot be traced to classical antiquity, nor was it influenced by Byzantium.

It seems more plausible to derive the organizational pattern of the medieval university from the Islamic schools of learning . . . British Islamic scholars give an affirmative answer to the question: 'Did the Arabs invent the university?' They maintain that Islamic institutions of learning were the source of the idea of organizing foreign students into nations and that they were also the source of the ideas of the universal validity of the qualification for teaching conferred by the *venia docendi*, of the academic robe, and of the title of the *baccalarius*. Of course, the invocation of such affinities often confuses the *propter hoc* with the *post hoc*; it does not demonstrate whether and how the later forms emerged from the earlier ones. Furthermore, the discernment of such affinities requires an exact knowledge of both traditions. The term *baccalarius* could not be an Islamic importation of the twelfth century because it was already in use in the ninth century as the Latin designation of a preparatory or auxiliary

status in a variety of social careers. The American Islamicist, Makdisi, who is to be taken more seriously, has discovered eighteen substantial affinities between the Islamic and the occidental patterns of the organization of learning and their transmission through institutional arrangements more or less like universities. He has concluded, however, that 'the university is a twelfth century product of the Christian West of the twelfth century, not only in its organization but also in the privileges and protection it received from Pope and King'. But the situation is different with regard to the colleges, which he does derive from Islamic models.

The borrowings which the university made from other medieval institutions were more important. . . . [The] very idea of the *universitas* is drawn from the term for many kinds of cooperative associations. The term had, however, to be supplemented to refer to the special features of the university, namely *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* or *universitas studii*. The corporate features, privileges, statutes, seals, and oaths and the functions and titles of their officials all have a close affinity to contemporaneous legal and organizational forms. Taken as a whole, the medieval university, as is apparent in the various chapters of this volume, is part of and an expression of its social environment.



POSTSCRIPT



Does the Modern University Have Its Roots in the Islamic World?

It is tempting to think that all modern institutions, especially all those that we find admirable, have come down to us in a direct line from our Western intellectual forbears the Greeks. To take the university as a case in point, however, we cannot trace its origins to Greece—neither the Greeks nor Romans had universities. Higher education in the Greco-Roman world was a much less tightly organized enterprise of student-teacher interaction. There were no diplomas, courses of study, examinations, or commencements—at least not as we understand these terms today. Agreeing that we cannot trace the Western university to the Greeks, Rüegg and Nakosteen part company on where its roots actually lie. Rüegg finds universities springing up in Bologna, Paris, Salerno, and Oxford out of an existing corporate model that had the blessing of church and state. Nakosteen finds an unbroken line from the eighth-century Islamic world to the late European Middle Ages. The university system, he argues, was formed in an Islamic context and made its way unchanged into a European one.

If we begin a history of education from within the Islamic world, new patterns will emerge. For an introduction to Islam as providing a way to perceive reality, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* by Bassam Tibi (Westview Press, 1991) offers a clear introduction to the Sunni/Shi'a split in Islam, which persists today, and a discussion of language (in this case Arabic) as the medium in which cultural symbols are articulated. Students may also be interested in Francis Robinson, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 7, "Knowledge, Its Transmission, and the Making of Muslim Societies." In Chapter 9 "The Iranian Diaspora: The Edge Creates a Center" of *Islam: A View from the Edge* (Columbia University Press, 1994), Richard W. Bulliet describes the role of Iranian scholars in the spread of *madrassa* or Islamic colleges.

For additional background on European universities of the Middle Ages, see *The Medieval University* by Helene Wieruszowski (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1966) and *The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages: 1000–1300* by John W. Baldwin (D. C. Heath, 1971). The movie *Stealing Heaven* tells the story of Heloise and Abelard. Set in twelfth-century France, it also offers a very realistic portrayal of the emerging European university system of disputation between professor and students. Finally, Norman F. Cantor's *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (HarperCollins, 1993) has a chapter titled "Moslem and Jewish Thought: The Aristotelian Challenge," which summarizes the influence of Islamic thought on Europe.